

The OPEN COURT

Devoted to the Science of Religion,
the Religion of Science, and the Extension
of the Religious Parliament Idea

FOUNDED BY EDWARD C. HEGELER

JANUARY, 1931

←————→
VOLUME XLV NUMBER 896

Price 20 Cents

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Wieboldt Hall, 339 East Chicago Avenue
Chicago, Illinois

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THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW

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WILLIAM A. HAMMOND

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and G. WATTS CUNNINGHAM

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THE COAT OF ARMS OF DEATH
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A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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SURD

BY H. LLOYD MORRIS

FEET by feet by feet of dank cubic vacuity in the greasy earth of a shunned island—dark and low-lying under the imminence of dawn that looked forth in supernal remoteness through bars of black and red and gold! Feet by feet by feet of cubic matter that once was pulsing humanity; and now—unlovely carrion stacked in long, thin white pine boxes on the cobbled floor of a wharf clammy with exuding damp; cold with the humid caress of drifting scarves of mist; desolate beneath the desolate sky. . . . And between waiting matter and prepared space—a waterway outstretched below the broad murk of heaven like a flat black band; moving soundlessly; passing tenebrously from obscurity to obscurity!

The cry of a lonely gull wheeling on a rising wind that sighs as a brief exhalation through the visible cavern of Being: here beheld arched by the firmament; paved with corruptibility; and pillared with spreading beams of light angled from earth to heaven—ladders of glory which to our knowledge bring portent of storm; but to our eager fancy have become loved symbols of radiant epiphanies that are the yearning hopes of ancient faiths!

Tainted odor on the tang of brine-laden airs from distant fields of spume; the uneasy slapping of water against rotting green piles; the far call of seabird to seabird; the rising tremolo of regnant wind; the eastern sky cracked wide and dawn in fountains of light spilling through the crannied welkin—morning and the mournfulness of day over the desolate wharf and the dead naked to the wild sky; morning over the island: lighting there a solitary cross; rough-hewn a squat and sombre against the far horizon!

Many dead are there on that island; but only one cross; squat

and scranneled. From arm to shaft descending, the growing illumination reaches downward to the tooled plinth; and under the thin trembling fingers of light leaps out to everyman the challenge graven there, that; "*He calleth His own by name. . .*"

"... Be still in your boxes, Children of Mortality; not yet is the call for you. First must you Dead go to the dead—vagabond to vagabond; prostitute to prostitute; tatterdamalion to tatterdamalion; age to age; infant to infant. From this Gotham Town wharf, up the sliding river, through the strait called Hell Gate to Hart's Island, you solid must be taken to fill the vacuity: your catafalque an ancient steamboat your requiem, felons' curse and jest. . . . Hell Gate and Hart's Island! what punning quip of cartographic nomenclature is this; unmatched in mordancy by the ribald quirk of convict gravediggers' salacious burlesque of Poor Yorick!

"—Be still, Little Ones; I know your vestment is rough and cold; but you wear it at the expense of dogs' kennels, old garden sheds, and other useful structures that might have had it or patches . . . !"

Two-and-four-and-six—thirty adult-sized boxes—One-two-and-three-and—fourteen little cases. . . . "But there are forty-five of you to be called by name—!"

"—What name is yours, Littlest One, sharing your mother's box? Man never gave you one; it must still be lying in the heart of God. . . . What name is yours, child, lying in your own little case?—You don't know! . . . How should you know when your mother never knew—you infected spawn of alcoholic bacchanal!—Sss-h! you, too, will be called by name—No, your mother is not here . . . she is in the lapping water, the wreathing mist, the sullen clouds—she is everywhere; for she went up in smoke. First she had a nice fluid injected into her: she was frozen and thawed and frozen; her insides were cut out and put outside; her legs were off; her eyes were out, and then when she was done with and the last student had paddled her bits about on the slab, she went up in smoke—Husheen! and rockaby, Bantling; husheen! and lap-you-warm!—yes, she will be called by name. . . ."

Pound by pound by pound!—two tons of human carrion at twelve dollars per carrion; for that is what it will cost to dispose of today's batch of Gotham Town's unclaimed, unwanted corpses.

What courageous effort against overwhelming circumstance;

what despair, what sacrifice; what hates and passion and cowardice lie unrecorded here? To some in this world of fitful approvals and vulgar requitements, are insignia of commemorative honor for wounds received or life laid down in the bestial enterprise of gaudy war. For some we trim our gay suits with posies; set forth dainties, and hang gallant garlands on every cottar's door: because that in dull butchery man vilely did deface some human thing, or take the lives of fellowmen. Here, too, in this waiting consignment of decomposition and dishonor, may surely lie unknown soldiers who without drum-beat or trumpet's shrill fanfare or tumultuous reverberation of concerted acclaim, quietly died in drab economic battle; waged that some one dear beyond their own life might live. Yet no posy is here to grace the dead: from all the rich furniture of our life's boasted amplitude we have spared not one smallest superfluity of garniture to deck these poor remains. Even the successful trickster in death is forgiven and bidden God-speed. Even the stark little domestic pet, that in its brief life was a feathered joy or furry delight or boisterous companion of leisured rambles; is wrapped away in kindly little ceremonies dampened perhaps by children's tears; and remembered with a pang when on broad landscapes the solitude recalls a bounding companionship now quiet beneath a mulch of Summer's braveries in a corner of some familiar garden. But here will sound no elegaic farewells to somebody's kith and kin; of life the jest; and in death the butt of ribald salicity.

Come, young Lovers, still new in nuptials; leave your firstborn sleeping in its satin lined cot: come and see where through life's dread vicissitudes of circumstance, her little head after terror and pain may pillow its dancing curls. Come mothers, come and see to what dire departure may come the fruit of that ecstasy over whose entrance into life you screamed in the red anguish of pain; over whom you watched through sleepless nights of murmured prayer. Come, father, and behold the place, the box in which may lie your pride and joy; whose well-being put lines in your young face, black care in your heart and white upon your immature head. Come Plutocrat, and view to what, despite your schemes and legislative safeguards, your adored grandchild may here be heir to. Living, you forge deed and instrument of mortmain to be your servitors; when from beyond the tomb you would seek to preserve to your generation that you have garnered for them—who are you;

what powers and prescriptions, what incantations are yours to command, to check the strange sad ways of destiny, wherein Man squirming through his temporal day, registers in riot and revolution, sociological progress? Come, Hedonist, come Libertine and contemplate what your few minutes worship in the Temple of Venus has produced in Eternity!—look upon the face of your high-priestess—what there is left of it—kiss it; you kissed it once! Come, Priest and Prelate; Lay Sister and Professed Nun! Come, children of high degree, leave your woolly bears; they cannot answer when you call, nor romp when you would; but these infancies here would have danced to your piping. Come, Farmers, let us leave the upland and the prairie and take the road to Gotham Town. Come, Honorable Legislators in Congress Assembled! Come one, come all—here hath been murder done, but no trap will be sprung; no switch shot home. Come then, Citizens, without fear and behold what the dimensioned world and our social structure produce; come, and let us, murders each and all, take remedial heed of that over which we have jurisdiction and responsibility; lest what we here witness shall, when our own comely funerals are done, be the obsequies of those we love and leave behind us—for riddance at twelve dollars per carcass—!

“—You Dead!—did the whole forty-five of you, when living, produce the cost of one of you dead?—Speak! Speak! say that one of you was not all sot or satyr or slut! . . . That you lie in this sad wise is nothing; nothing that you died most miserably; or that your living moments were epic or comedy of pain and sorrow and privation—”

The outward circumstance is of itself without significance, but the inward response is all. And if but one least portion of merit be here indifferently abused with the reprobate; if but the most vile and contemned in this pregnant mass of dishonored death was once animated by a spirit that under the press of integrating circumstance failed and faltered but never wavered from the ideal; learned not to pay for bitter bread with bitter coin; and went down with the uncomplaining joyance of a happy galliard—then marvel and rejoice, thou, Passer-By; because that there is hope and glory for this living world; and in this tonnage of incipient putrescence, nothing for tears. . . .

“—What sent you here, you Dead? Some adulterated mess of

Syrian Pottage, cruel Semetic Mask or philosophic doubt? Where was your Olivet; of what goblet did you drink, in what strange Gethsemanes? What lights lit you along the road to this Golgotha?—strange glows from levin infernal; or tongues of flame that touched your heart, bewildered your eyes, wavered and went out? Rum and hunger; cold and wet; venereal disease, murder and suicide were behind the fine names that appeared on the death certificates as agents of your presence here—you offals from the social organism—are you, also Divine vomit?—Sss-h! lie still; according to the standards of men you failed, but—*‘He calleth His own by name’*—two tons of you! . . . living, you were a trifle more—

“—No, old hunger-slain scholar, who will totter into no more public libraries, the difference does not represent the weight of your immortal parts. In life some of you who had two eyes and a nose, now have only one eye and no nose. Then, too, there are the emanations. . . .”

A little newsprint shall serve to obstruct their emission from one creviced box which presently shall act as seat whereon a convict negro driver will sit and belch wind over the girlish face that was once the dear delight of a quiet colonial mansion beside the Potomac—!

“—Tut, tut! a very great Divine ruled that such things are only the mechanical operations of the Holy Spirit! . . . take the newsprint whither you go; it tells of a living Divine whose mouth smeared with butter and crumbs of toast, declares that we have here brought to fruition the greatest nation this world has ever known. We have here a vast christian community of fellowship (loud applause) wherefrom poverty has been discharged; (renewed cheering) and in the faces of our happy healthy children, and our prosperous contented citizenry is witnessed the triumph of those immortal policies which have given liberty, and opportunity to each and all (prolonged cheers). . . .”

“—Sss-s-h! quiet, quiet!—you say, ‘the cop should not have kicked an old man like you in the stomach; that the house was an empty house, and you were only lying quietly on the doorstep waiting’—Waiting for what?—Oh!—well, you have it now; and you know the policeman was a servant of the public, and you were only a public charge. . . .”

“—Ho! there; cheerily, Old Soldier, cheerily; you’re pretty

straight in your box aren't you?—rub-a-dub, rub-a-dub, the general is coming; you'd better get ready to present arms—you—'haven't any—!' ”

“—And you, Young Sir; you were—'a Poet'—Oh!—well, let's lift up a merry stave:

Hark, Hark, the Dog Star's bark!

At Saturn's rings, at Saturn's rings:

Mars and Venus in the dark—

Poor Tom-a-Bedlam; poor Tom-a-Bedlam—!

You had what?—'tender sensitiveness too delicate for contacts with the harsh industrial world'—Then why didn't you go back to nature—polar circles—tropics—lots of nature free, that hasn't been industrialized—You what?—'could not have lived alone in the wilds'—Umph! so you acknowledge your dependence on organized society. And what pray, was to be your contribution to united human effort in return for its advantages?—Eh!—Oh! well you needn't repeat any more of it—ah'm! you'd better keep quiet, all of you: there's authorities—biological, sociological, theological—all the 'ological authorities littered all over the place explaining and classifying you in the flora and fauna of Society. You appear under endocrine functioning; sociological synapses, and silent areas in the social consciousness—pretty nasty, that; you'd better be quiet, no one likes to be called a synapse. . . . Besides, you are a disturbance to the devotional calm in the neighborhood religious edifices; so seemly and candle-litten—”

“—The cost of one candle would have saved you from dying of hunger!’ . . . My, child, it is the Lord's candle. . . . I cannot tell you, Little One, what you did that it was your portion to live your little life so painfully and die so miserably. . . . No, no priest or clergy are here to be by your side, and there are no flowers—Oh! sweetheart, thou art thyself a floweret of blossoming eternity, dragged and stamped into finite slime. . . .”

“—Be still, You Chemical Experiments; out of the municipal lodging house on the quay side, living men are shambling. For their lodging for the night they must pay by loading you on a boat that in past years carried happy excursion parties; and resounded with frolic and fun. . . .”

Music and dancing feet; and phantom echoes from the tripping steps of dancers of a day that is done! None but the dead know

the dead; to the phantom ear come phantom sounds of bells across the sea where the dayspring is earlier than here; and all among the stately habitations of men beside quiet rivers and turbulent sea, the Bells of Christendom are ringing—"yes, Child, there are 'other bells than the bells of Christendom; other seas; other hills. . . !'"

Feet by feet by feet!—"Hear them! the sullen paces of convicts who have been driven from their pens on this island to unload you, Dead from the boat; and drive you in carts to the pit. . . !"

Pound by pound by pound!—"Gee-gees?"—yes, Little Fellow; they are pulling the trucks—Sure, the trucks will be heavy with all your weight—No, the gee-gees are not cold. They have a nice thick warm blanket to cover their backs—I know you 'never had any thing thick and warm like that to wear' my brave little fellow. But you see, the horses are carried on the books as an asset; and assets have to be conserved. You were carried on no one's books and are a liability of twelve dollars wholesale; and more individually—You're 'glad the horses have a nice warm blanket'—That's my gallant boy; I knew you wouldn't mind the horses being kept warm. . . ."

Emanation, emanation, emanation!—A trilogy of Matter in tainted odor! . . . We are nearing the Pit: we have passed the Cross, and are rolling on in our trucks. . . .

Time, time, time!—The quadrature of dimension—"Hear them, the Bells of Pelham. . . . 'Tis Sabbath Morning—!"

"'What's o'clock? my hearties! what's o'clock?' you cry! Why its Olympiad o' the Quaternary Morning; and never a finer since first the Cosmic Clock did strike out its chiming hours of Zoic time. . . . !"

Relativity, relativity, relativity!—The Quintessence of Dimension!—O, Earth, Mother Earth, whose barren curvature of virginity uncovered to the Universe, was kissed of the Firmament and didst bring forth these Children conceived in the Finite and begotten of Infinity; we come again to Thy Womb. . . . Earth to Earth, committing in regeneration. . . . Dust to Dust, the bodies. . . . Ashes to Ashes, of These. . . . Time to Time, dearly beloved. . . . Abstraction to Abstraction, our Brothers and Sisters transcendent now and clean past the Tyranny of Dimension. . . . !